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SUBJECT: UPBEAT FM ZEBARI HAILS CABINET SOFA APPROVAL "A
GOOD DAY FOR ALL OF US," BUT NO TIME TO LET UP

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Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: A beaming Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari greeted Ambassador Crocker with a hearty "Mabruk" November 16, a few hours after the Iraqi Council of Ministers (CoM) had approved the SOFA by a near-unanimous vote. Zebari, in a decidedly upbeat mood that was a striking contrast from his demeanor during recent discussions on the subject, hailed the CoM's action as "a good day for all of us." That said, he agreed with the Ambassador that we need to be vigilant in the coming days and guard against efforts to stall the agreement in the Council of Representatives (CoR). He and other key Ministers would soon go to the CoR to "collectively defend" the agreement and stress that the document must be voted on as a whole -- it cannot be opened up for any amendments. Zebari also provided a readout of his recent visit to Damascus (septel); said the ongoing "Five Committee" talks are providing an excellent forum for frank, productive and congenial discussions on important topics; confirmed that that the KRG and GOI are coordinating in advance of the November 19 Trilateral Talks with Turkey; and promised to work with Minister of Interior Bolani to ensure that security for the Papal Nuncio is beefed up in light of the November 15 bombing outside the Papal Nuncio's embassy. End Summary.

SOFA: A "Good Day for All of Us"
But This is No time to Let Up

¶2. (S) FM Zebari said the November 16 CoM vote approving the SOFA and sending it on to the CoR had gone very well. All ministers present, except

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in all the committees and noted that Ayad Sammarai is participating in the political system talks, which is dealing with complex issues including constitutional review, jurisdictions and division of power between federal authorities and the KRG.

¶6. (S) Zebari noted that not all the proposals are immediately implementable but what is important is that there is a process to work toward solutions. He noted that, at one point, PM Maliki's legal advisor (who along with PM Advisor Tareq Abdullah is representing Maliki) argued that Kurds should not participate in the service ministries in Baghdad. Zebari said he countered by stating "we're participating as Iraqis, not Kurds, on an equal basis. If you want to draw the line and say everything here is ours and everything there is yours, we have a problem." He noted that the Political System committee is preparing a paper summarizing the 50 issues under discussions (only seven of where participants are divided, he said) and that he would be happy to share it

with us when it is ready.

Turkey Trilateral Talks

17. (S) Turning briefly to the November 19 U.S.-facilitated Trilateral talks between Turkey, the GOI and the KRG, Ambassador Crocker underlined the importance of ensuring that the GOI representative to the talks, Minister of State for National Security Sherwan Wa'eli, meet with the KRG representatives beforehand to coordinate positions. Zebari said the thinking in Erbil is the same. The KDP representative (KRG Interior Minister Kareem Sinjari) and the PUK representative (whom Zebari could not name, but whom President Talabani separately named as Asayish commander Dr. Khasrow Goran) would be coming early to Baghdad for that very purpose. Zebari said the atmosphere with Turkey is now very positive and there is a willingness to engage them constructively. Ambassador Crocker pointed out that the talks also provide an excellent opportunity and a good basis for improved coordination between Baghdad and Erbil.

Security for the Papal Nuncio

18. (S) Finally, Ambassador Crocker noted that the bombing the previous day in front of the Embassy of the Papal Nuncio had left the Nuncio very concerned for his safety, especially in light of threats against him regarding the Article 50 minorities issue. The explosion had blown out the embassy's windows and thrown debris onto its grounds. The Ambassador relayed that the Nuncio had asked him to contact Minister of Interior Bolani to request beefed up security, additional T-walls and other measures. Anything Zebari could do with Bolani to help with this would be appreciated. Zebari promised to make sure the MFA and MOI work together to provide the necessary protection. The Ambassador noted that the Nuncio is a very able and professional diplomat and an attack on him or his embassy, he noted, would be terrible. (Comment: in follow-up conversations with the Nuncio, he has conveyed satisfaction with the GOI response, but we will remain in close contact with him).
CROCKER